

Criteria for Conducting an Independent Project Review

An independent review is a critical assessment of a project. It is an unbiased, independent, and detached evaluation of project health, conducted by qualified and objective individuals.

An independent review should be sponsored when:

- It is observed that the project requires new insights that may not be readily apparent or available and that there is value in establishing a better and objective understanding of the project, based on the Project Manager's advice, sponsor's observation, or review gate decision.
- The project is encountering unexpected challenges that warrant an independent assessment and or advice.
- There is a Council or senior management request for an independent review.
- There is no consensus among stakeholders as to whether the project warrants further investment during the gating decision-making process.
- There are complexities to the project that warrant an independent review to confirm constructability / implementations. (E.g., using a third-party review to confirm the structural constructability of a bridge based on the design.)
- Embarking on a new project (that has not been done before) or using a new technology for a project.
- There is a known or perceived position of a major stakeholder that portends danger to the project (such as the Project Manager or Sponsor exhibiting optimism or uniqueness bias, or a client insisting on the inclusion of a requirement that would not help the project).

The following should be noted when considering an Independent Project Review:

- The conditions stated above should be based on the Project Manager's advice, sponsor's judgement, or review gate decision.
- An independent review is a solution option and not a requirement for projects (except otherwise stated in the Business Case or Project Charter) and should be treated as such.
- A review can be performed on a phase or specific aspect of the project (a Targeted review) or on the entire project (a General review)
- An independent review does not guarantee a solution or turn around in the state of the project, and sometimes may not discover anything new. This, however, does not suggest that the effort is a waste of time and resources, or that the reviewer has not done their job correctly. The goal is to investigate and rule out any unknown or hidden issues or factors that may jeopardize the success of the project.

Selecting an Independent Reviewer

- The selection of an independent reviewer should not be influenced by project stakeholders with vested interest in the project or are known, or perceived to be, protagonists or antagonist of the project or its outcomes.
- The reviewer must be a qualified professional and a subject matter expert in the project field with adequate expertise to offer superior and objective recommendations.
- The reviewer must not have a conflict of interest – real or perceived – with the project (for example, they have no previous or subsequent work attached to the project and therefore no stake in its approval or project outcomes).
- The reviewer must not be prejudiced by the normal biases of those with a vested interest in the project or its outcome (for example, they should be able to maintain objectivity and stay at arm's length from those with a stake in the project).
- The reviewer should not consider themselves as superior but should work to recognize and complement the effort of the project team by providing detached, unbiased, critical evaluation of the project and recommending solutions that will help achieve the project goal.

The sponsor of the review is responsible for:

- Ensuring funds are available to conduct the independent review.
- Developing the requirements for the statement of work.
- Establishing priorities for the reviewer.
- Engaging the project team and stakeholders to ensure cooperation along with active and honest participation.
- Being available throughout the review to discuss any findings that emerge and solve problems where necessary.
- Sharing the key findings and recommendations with project governance and oversight bodies, the project manager, and other key stakeholders.
- Ensuring that findings and recommendations are appropriately addressed.
- Promoting open and honest disclosure of information to ensure that the reviewer is able to uncover accurate and pertinent information to expose underlying problems.
- Ensuring the review is objective by not trying to either control or limit it. A controlled or limited review is less likely to uncover problems that could adversely impact project success if left unresolved.